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ABSTRACT

The student brings to translation a predetermined set of criteria for words, grammar, sentence structure, writing, and communication generally, as well as the relative success experienced using those criteria in one's native language. Even at the advanced level, the student brings assumptions to reading that are more a reflection of personal prejudice than a true understanding of the material. Experiments conducted in both tutoring and classroom situations suggest that the greater knowledge and awareness individual students have of their own identity, culture, and language attitudes, the greater their success in translation. Language instructors can use knowledge of the students to facilitate translation, gearing instruction to their strengths and weaknesses. Better translation results from instruction that encourages students to identify their own personal style. A three-stage exercise with a single work that involves writing a literal translation, then a version portraying the mood of the piece without strict precision, and finally a personally ideal translation, has been found helpful in illustrating to students how well they understand the piece as a cultural entity, a reflection of historical and personal experience. Examples of translation exercises using Chinese poetry are included. (MSE)

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WHERE CULTURES CLASH:

TEACHING TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES

by

Carol Derrikson

a paper presented at the November 1985 annual conference of the Chinese Language Teacher's Association by Carol Derrickson in New York, New York Marriott Marquis

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Cultural proficiency, as it is often understood, is the level of success in interaction and communication of a student with natives of a culture in the native setting. The draft for cultural proficiency levels, which was discussed last year in Chicago, aims at full social and professional competence in Chinese, with additional specific geographic and historical knowledge as a supplement. In the February 1985 issue of the CLTA Journal, Albert Dien further emphasizes the behavioral and body-language aspects of cultural proficiency.[1] I would suggest, however, that cultural proficiency for a student can also be registered in levels of success in translation.

The encounter of a student with an original piece of Chinese literature is just as surely a cultural encounter as that of being in China itself. Language is a unifying element of culture; literature is its manifestation. The factual content, intent, and emotion of a literary piece will be apprehended at varying levels, depending on the students' knowledge of that new culture and the knowledge of their own personal orientation to language.

Translation consists of many elements. Both the literature and the translator are multi-faceted. T.H. Savory, in the book The Art of Translation, has produced a humorous summary of what happens in translation.

> The truth is that there are no universally accepted principles of translation, because the only people who are qualified to formulate them have never agreed among themselves, but have so often and for so long contradicted each other that they have bequeathed to us a volume of confused thought which must be hard to parallel in other fields of literature.[2]

Savory then puts such principles in contrasting pairs, to illustrate his point. Such as:

1. A translation must give the words of the original.

2. A translation must give the idea of the original.
3. A translation should read like an original work.
4. A translation should read like a translation.
5. A translation should reflect the style of the original.
6. A translation should possess the style of the translator.[3]

And the list goes on.

As translation for students progresses from a language element skill, to a reading skill, and then a creative skill, there is a two-fold value. First, students achieve success at differentiated goals. Secondly, they proceed in a sequential development toward proficiency. Reading proficiency stops short of translation as a creative skill.

The student brings to translation a pre-determined set of criteria for words, grammar, sentence structure, writing and communication generally. Along with this is brought the relative success of using those criteria in the student's native culture. Any instruction in the new language a student acquires is added to this previous information. Even at the more advanced level, the student brings assumptions to reading that are more a reflection of personal prejudice than understanding of the material. Students usually reflect cultural prejudices of their own country; for example, the American stance against communism. Even after discussing historical background to a piece by Mao Zedong or by the Chinese Communist Party, avid American students have been known to be absolutely convinced that the author/s were really fed-up with Marxism-Leninism, or that all the Chinese needed was good old-fashioned capitalism. The correct understanding of content is a prerequisite to translation as a creative skill.

Experiments I've conducted over the last several years appear to indicate that the greater knowledge and awareness individual students have of their own identity, their own culture, and attitude toward language generally, the greater the student's success in translation. Language instructors can then utilize knowledge of the student to facilitate translation. The information gathered in these experiments

was both from private tutoring, as well as classroom settings. It is not strictly scientifically precise, but indicates overall trends in student work.

Dan, for example, requested private tutoring in Chinese. (Names have been changed for presentation purposes.) Dan is a 39 year old black man. He served in Vietnam, learned acupuncture in Boston and used it to treat alcohol and drug addicts. He has travelled in China and Africa, and is very proud of his African heritage. African culture and language are a prominent part of his life. Dan has studied and now teaches Tai Ji Quan. His request for tutoring in Chinese was specifically to understand Chinese texts about Tai Ji, though he would also like to learn to speak and write it someday.

Dan started out translating the names of the moves in several Tai Ji forms. It quickly became clear that he was not interested in grammar or grammar rules. The order of the words and the meaning derived from that order, for example in 太極起勢 (tài jí qǐ shì) (see #1 on sheet), was not only unimportant to him; but the explanation of it became counterproductive. He would argue or simply remain confused.

As he learned more about how he related to the language, what he wanted or would accept, certain facets stood out. First, Dan was very interested in the characters. They captured his imagination, so he learned how to use Chinese dictionaries. He bought two for himself: one large one for simplified, and one smaller one for simplified and traditional characters.

Considering his love of his racial history and its origins, it followed that Dan was particularly intrigued with Chinese origin stories and the dissecting of characters. One example is the Chinese word 勁 (jìn), meaning the energy force emitted when practicing Tai Ji or generally strong and unyielding. The left-hand side of the character means flowing water, as in underground stream. The right side is strength.[4] Both from his acupuncture training and Tai Ji, Dan was

already familiar with the meridians and the flow of qi in the body. So explaining each side of the character struck him in a particularly meaningful way. (see #2 on sheet)

Thus, the attitudes and experiences Dan brought to Chinese were definitive in how he could be effectively instructed. One his framework of thought became clear, instruction could proceed much more effectively.

The same sensitivity and awareness can be applied to a larger number of students in a classroom setting. One activity in particular seems to bring out the peculiarities of each student in such a way that both student and instructor can benefit. In 1984, a group of advanced Chinese students were studying an introduction to Chinese poetry. They read some of the ci and shi poetry of Li Qingzhao. For the poem "Zùi Huā Yīn" or "Intoxicated in a cloud of flowers" (see #3 on sheet), after discussing biographical and historical information, the students were to do the following: first, write a literal, word-for-word translation of the poem; secondly, write a version that portrayed the mood of the poem, without necessarily sticking to grammatical or imagery precision; and thirdly, to write a translation of the poem that to them was ideal. The result were some interesting interpretations, and powerful translations. The students were particularly fascinated that for the same poem, so many different versions could be created. From the students' perspective, each learned more about how well they understood the poem as a cultural entity, a reflection of historical and personal experience. They were more aware of the use of words and grammar in the poem to create mood. And they were more sensitive to how English was used as the medium of translation.

Though the students learned a great deal from this experiment, the poem itself presented a few problems. The length of the poem and the difficulty of the characters was satisfactory. However, the imagery and innuendo in the poem was difficult for the students; they were confused how to put those into effective

English. For example, the last line " rén bǐ huang hua shòu." presented the various possibilities of how to interpret shòu. The imagery was too rich and difficult to deal with.

In 1985, the same type of technique was tried again. A group of advanced students were focusing on Chinese composition and would be looking at a variety of Chinese literary styles. A poem was once again chosen as the piece to be translated; but this time is was a twentieth-century author and it was written in a simpler, more straightforward style. The poem was Guo Moro's "Sìde Yòu Hùo" or "The temptation of death", written in 1918. The students were to write the same three types of translation as before, of which the literal translations remained very much alike in style and form. (see #4 on sheet)

The translation in free mode, or with Western imagery, produced more variety; for example, the following by Denise Wise:

Flirting with Death

I have a small container of qualudes
Which, set upon my nightstand, continuously gazes at me.
She calmly calls to me:
Christopher, don't dwell on your troubles!
Quickly enter my world
So I can rid you of all suffering.

Upon my dresser stands a delicate bottle,
Which also gazes at me.
She says with sweet sincerity:
Christopher, don't dwell on all your troubles!
Quickly, let our lips embrace
So I can rid you of all suffering.

This student captured the mood of the earlier poem and created a contemporary equivalent.

In the same student's ideal translation, she translates the original poem:

I possess a small knife
Which, leaning against the window ledge, with a smile
Says to me:
Moro, you musn't be worried!
Quickly come give me a kiss

So I can rid you of all your worries.

The deep, green sea outside the window
Continuously calls to me.
She says:
Moro, you musn't be worried!
Quickly come enter my bosom
So I can rid you of all worries.

When the translations were read and discussed in class, the students reacted even more strongly to the variety of ideas and interpretations expressed among the group. The student, whose imagination had created vivid imagery and who was sensitive to the mood of the poem, felt reaffirmed. She felt positive about her sensitivity to the piece, as well as her use of English to convey the meaning and mood of the original.

The students, for whom there was little difference between translations, caught a glimpse of possibility. They were challenged to be more sensitive to the original and more vital in their translation..

After this, instruction could be geared to the strengths and weaknesses of the students. A system of checks and balances was created. The imaginative students had to be checked to make sure they did in fact understand the literal meaning and grammar. The literal students could be shown ways to grasp whole ideas which express mood. Proceeding from level to level, they could move from a stance of word-for-word translation, to looking for overall sentence structure, becoming aware of connective words, and then of the links between parts in paragraphs or sections as a whole. For example, in this poem, the use of rhyme and rhythm and parallelism are significant.

Translation, then, becomes a test. It is a self-test of one's own ideas and culture, as another entirely different one is set forward in which to work and explore. Only genuine, original pieces should be used, otherwise one simply learns how to convey foreign cultural prejudices in the Chinese language.

If translation is a creative skill, exercising that skill is essential. Better translations result from students who undergo instruction in identifying their own personal translation style. The three-fold translation exercise described may not be appropriate for all students or instructors. However, when it is used, the results indicate that both students and instructors benefit, leading to greater efficiency and clarity in the teaching setting. The process of translation becomes one of self-understanding brought to cultural proficiency in an academic milieu.

Reference sheet for Carol Derrickson' "Where cultures clash..."

1. tài jí qǐ shì
太極起勢,太极起勢

2. jìn 勁力,劲

3. Zuì Huā Yīn
by Li Qingzhao

醉花阴

《醉花阴》，词牌名，首见于北宋毛滂《东堂词》。此词一题"重阳"或"九日"。

这首词抒写了作者寂寞无聊的心情。词的末三句，"莫道不消魂，帘卷西风，人比黄花瘦"。比喻新颖，婉转含蓄地表达了作者的伤感情绪。历来为人称道。

薄雾浓云愁永昼，瑞脑消金兽(1)。佳节又重阳，玉枕纱厨(2)，半夜凉初透。东篱把酒黄昏后(3)，有暗香盈袖(4)。莫道不消魂(5)，帘卷西风(6)，人比黄花瘦(7)。

(1) 瑞脑句：意谓瑞脑在铜香炉中烧光了。瑞脑，一种香料。金兽，兽形的铜香炉。
(2) 玉枕：磁制的凉枕。纱厨：纱帐。
(3) 东篱：种菊花的园地。陶渊明《饮酒》诗："采菊东篱下，悠然见南山。"
(4) 暗香：幽香。此指菊花的香气。
(5) 消魂：即销魂，因离别而引起的极度悲苦之情。江淹《别赋》："黯然销魂者，唯别而已矣。"
(6) 帘卷句：意谓帘子被西风吹卷起。西风，秋风。
(7) 黄花：菊花。

4. Sì De Yòu Huò
by Guo Mo Ro

死的誘

我有一把[2]小刀[3]，
倚[4]在窗邊向我笑，
她[5]向我笑道[6]：
沫若[7]，你別用心焦[8][9]！
你快來親我的唇兒[10]，
我好替你除卻[12]許多煩惱[11]

窗外的青青海水，
不住聲地[14]也向我叫號[15]。
她向我叫道：
沫若，你別用心焦！
你快來入我的懷兒[16]，
我好替你除卻許多煩惱

原註：這是我最早的詩，大概是1918年初作的。

The source # 3 on the reference sheet is from:

Zhongguo Gudai Wenxue Zuopin Xian
Shaanxi, 1982, pp. 136-137.

中国古代文学作品选

The source #4 is from:

Modern Chinese Poetry, an annotated reader by Richard F. Chang and William L. MacDonald
Far Eastern Publications, Yale University
New Haven, CT 1973, P. 17.

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ENDNOTES

1. Albert Dien, "Provisional Chinese Descriptions — Culture," Journal of the Chinese Language Teacher's Association, vol. XXI, no. 1, February 1985, pp. 79-83.
2. T.H. Savory, The Art of Translation, Jonathan Cape, London, 1968, pp. 49-50.
3. Ibid., p. 50.
4. Compare entries 1119, 1117 and 3920 in Mathews' Chinese English Dictionary, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963.